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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 003209

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2014

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SUBJECT: GOJ REITERATES IMPORTANCE OF U.S. TIES IN WAKE OF POSTPONEMENT OF KING'S WASHINGTON VISIT

REF: AMMAN 3148

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

PROTECTING U.S.-JORDAN RELATIONS

1. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador and PolCouns April 25, Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher said that King Abdullah wants to make sure the USG knows that he wants to visit Washington, and that the postponement of his April 21 meeting with the President was not in any way meant to damage U.S.-Jordan relations. Muasher said he had received "numerous" phone calls from prominent Jordanians -- many from the business community, and many not normally pro-American -- reminding him of the importance of maintaining good bilateral ties. Muasher said both he and the King understand and appreciate this point very well, and that Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed Halaqi's April 22 press statement (see below) was meant to address the concerns of those who fear slippage of bilateral ties. GID Director Saad Kheir made this same point in a separate meeting with the Ambassador on April 25, and he and Muasher also mentioned that the GOJ was making extraordinary efforts to keep negative press commentary on the U.S. to a minimum. (Comment: While editorial comment may have been tempered somewhat, the press continued to portray the U.S. as being in lockstep with Sharon and pursuing oppressive military action in Iraq. End Comment.)

2. (C) In fact, since the postponement of the King's Washington stop, senior Jordanian government officials have emphasized in public the importance of U.S.-Jordanian ties. For example, Muasher in his press walk-out with the Secretary in Washington April 20 said that "Jordan has no problems with the U.S. and we continue to work with it very closely." As Muasher mentioned to the Ambassador, Deputy PM Halaqi told the press in Amman April 22 that "the U.S. and Jordan enjoy solid relations politically, economically, militarily, and in the realm of counterterrorism." Halaqi's statement also emphasized the importance of U.S.-Jordan economic ties, proposed a June date for the bilateral Joint Commission meeting, and repeated earlier pronouncements that the postponement of the King's Washington visit will not affect bilateral relations. (Interestingly, this statement was carried prominently in the Arabic press, but not in the English press).

COMMENT

3. (C) As we noted in reftel, the postponement of the King's Washington visit and statements from GOJ officials on the need for "clarification" of the U.S. position calmed the local popular and media reaction to the Bush-Sharon exchange on Gaza disengagement and the Israeli killing of HAMAS leader Rantissi. The more recent positive statements about U.S.-Jordan relations are intended to protect Jordan's other flank and reassure those in the Jordanian government and elite who want to see the continuation of strong bilateral ties.

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GNEHM